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## WILD BIRDS OF THE ROAD

### THE MYSTERIOUS PASSAGE OF THE ROMMANYS

By ANNIE DOUGLAS SEVERANCE

Ah! not the nectarous poppy lovers use,  
Not daily labour's dull, Lethæan spring,  
Oblivion in lost angels can infuse  
Of the soiled glory, and the trailing wing.  
—*Mathew Arnold.*

THERE is a passage in an essay by Arthur Symons protesting against the extermination of the Gipsies, which so embodies those qualities of the wandering picturesque race that stir our own poetic feeling and sense of romance, that it seems to me it should live long after these "wild birds" of the road, now fast disappearing in Europe and this country, are no more.

"Can the world repress the race which is so evasive, and slips through its fingers like wind?" he questions. "They are the symbols of our aspirations and we do not know it; they stand for the will for freedom, for friendship with nature, for the open air, for change, and the sight of many lands, for all in us that is a protest against progress. They represent nature before civilization. They are the wanderers whom all of us who are poets, or love the wind are summed up in. They do what we dream. They are the last romance left on the earth. To try to suppress them is to fly against instinct; they are part of the spectacle of the world they pass through like a great procession to the sound of passionate music."

It would be a dull heart that did not respond to the call in these lines to a life of freedom and movement in country air.

They invite one to seek the aromatic odours of the woods, the fragrance of blossoming fruit trees in May, and the delicate scents of the earth; to be awakened at dawn by the robin, to sleep under the stars, to wander by day in forests and country lanes; to find stimulus in new scenes, and a renewed sense of personal identity in contact with nature. To obey seems to promise an end of complexities and responsibilities, and a gain in simplicity, as well as familiarity with a new chapter in the Art of Living.

Yet we have discovered that if we would move forward in this ordered sphere we cannot yield ourselves entirely to such idyllic impulses, and that those who follow them utterly sacrifice a development without which they must drop behind in the upward march of created things; and the people who for a thousand years have remained the idle children of the world are in this age fast being extinguished by an advancing civilization. From the fifteenth century the Gipsies have been hounded by the Statesmen of Europe, though never completely exterminated; but so rigid are the present British laws against them that they are vanishing from England as completely as the North American Indian is disappearing from this continent. In the United

States they come under the ban of the laws against vagrancy, and if caught begging and fortune-telling are liable to arrest. In a short time they will become absorbed into the lower strata of the nations through which they travel, and their long record of individualism will have been but a stage to something else.

We recognize them as the Kings and Queens of all the Vagabonds, but they answer back to some survival in us of a vanished order of things, when we, perhaps, were not so wise, and life ran more gaily. And while we stand aghast at them for daring to follow the love of living where it may lead—and at the result—we are eager to have our hearts stirred by tales of their adventurings, and of the marks they have left upon them. Matthew Arnold has hinted at some of the darkest of these in his verses *To A Gypsy Child by the Seashore*, whom he addresses as one of a disenchanted race, who have foreknown the vanity of hope, and foreseen the harvest, yet have proceeded to live; who drug pain by patience, love life a little, and loathe it more.

There have been many who were sensitive to the poetic side of the Gipsies' life, and have visited them and even lived among them, and some have believed that the race should be cared for as one cares for flowers. George Borrow, though he was fed the poisoned cake baked by Mrs. Hearne, and nearly done to death by the Flaming Tinman, had a love for the Rommays that was passionate, and intense, and in recording their secret habits he perpetuated much of the richness of their customs and traditions.

Matthew Arnold, after living among the Gipsies for a time wrote the poem of the Oxford Scholar who left the halls of learning to roam the world with the wandering train, and came to Oxford and his friends no more. And though he arrived,

as most men deemed, at little good, he stands out in bright contrast to our wisest who stay at home, and after much suffering take their seats dejectedly upon the intellectual throne, and there lay bare their store of sad experience. Charles G. Leland has written exhaustively of the English Gipsies, and has collected many of their proverbs, and much of their folk lore and philosophy, for they have not been without their share of a traditional kind of learning, distorted as it often appears by their warped mental processes. Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Pennell, in 1901, made a tour among the Transylvania Gipsies with the hope of discovering the ideal Rommany, and matter on the subject has been greatly added to by their sketches and etchings. In fact there is a huge enchanted jungle of Gipsy-lore, largely contributed to by members of the Gipsy Lore Society, which shall cause the knowledge and memory of the Gipsies to endure long after they have vanished from among us as a race.

English Gipsies call themselves Rommany Chals, and Rommany Chies, or sons and daughters of Rome. Rome, it is said, was built by vagabonds, and it may be as Borrow suggested, that some tribe of the kind settled down thereabouts, and called the town which they built after their name. But their origin is hidden in obscurity. It has been conjectured that during the conflicts among the Dard tribes in the twelfth century they may have emigrated from India. Their language appears to have sprung from the Sanskrit, or some Indian dialect, and by it it is possible to trace a route taken through Asia and Europe. A Greek influence is seen in all the Gipsy dialects in England.

In an early Flemish tapestry, Gipsy women are shown clothed in bright red cloaks, with loose underdresses and head-gear. At a later period they wore feathers,



BRAZILIAN GIPSIES WHO CAME TO THIS COUNTRY BY WAY OF MEXICO IN 1918 WITH A BAND OF 300 AND CAMPED NEAR BOSTON. THE PARTLY HIDDEN GIRL IS A 13-YEAR-OLD BRIDE

colored shawls, and satin dresses, while their men affected smart top boots, colored waistcoats, and velvet knee breeches. They traveled in caravans, visiting fairs and feasts, fiddling, dancing, and collecting money from the country people whose fortunes the women told. The men were mostly tinkers, blacksmiths, and horse-traders. They have been popularly connected with Egypt, and a legend current in Central Europe says that they were condemned to wander because of the refusal of their ancestors to receive the Virgin and Christ Child. In the tenth century, when we first hear of them, they were protected by the Church and attended its festivals. Leland asserts that they have no religion, only trifling superstitions, and neither a tie to the spiritual world nor a hope of a future. Still they have their version of The Lord's Prayer, which he has preserved, and which is given below. Judging from the appended ejaculations, however, it is possible that they regard religion as they do watch-dogs and the police, only as an interference to making a living.

"My sweet God who art there in Heaven, may Thy name come hallowed; may Thy kingdom come hither; may they do all that Thou wishest upon earth, and in Heaven. Give me to-day my daily bread, and forgive me all that I cannot pay Thee, as I shall forgive other men all that they do not pay me. Do not let me fall into evil desires; but take me out from all my wickedness. For thine is the kingdom, thine the power, thine the glory, now and forever.

"May the sweet God give us a remedy for our poverty. May God help us! May no misfortune happen to me in the road, and may no one steal anything from me. Go with God! Stay with God! Go, for God's sake! Stay, for God's sake! By God!"

The possession even of moral qualities has been generally denied the Gipsies ever since they were burned and hanged for sorcerers and witches. But some writers have declared this to be unfair, and Leland insists that they respond in like manner to their treatment. Borrow knew that the existence of their race depended largely upon the chastity and faithfulness of their women. The English Gipsies of his time chose their wives in the most careful manner. The couple were united by taking each other's hands in the presence of the assembled relatives, and vowing to be true to one another, and such marriages were considered more binding than those that took place in church. He speaks of one of the Hearnies who cut off his wife's ears as a punishment for unfaithfulness, and of another Gipsy lord who compelled his spouse to run naked around a large field every morning for the same offense.

Their proverbs, fables, and riddles show a shrewd wit, and are often moulded in poetic form. "The true way to be a wise man," said an English Gipsy, "is to hear, see, and bear in mind." From the Welsh Gipsies have been collected such riddles as these:

"What is it God does not see? Answer: Another like Himself."

"What is it that is alive in the front, dead in the middle, and body and soul behind? Answer: A plough."

"I was going over the bridge. I saw a little yellow man; I lifted him up; I drank his blood, and I threw him down. Answer: An orange."

The following fable was taken down by Charles Leland word for word from an English Gipsy, who told it with great eagerness, and added an improvised moral. It is given first in the original Rommany, then in the English translation.

HOW A GIPSY SAVED A CHILD'S LIFE BY  
BREAKING A WINDOW

'Pré yeck dívvus (or yéckorus) a Rommany chal was kairin' pýass with the koshters, an' he wussered a kosht' pré the hev of a boro ker an' poggered it. Welled the prastramengro and penned, "Tu must póoker (or péssur) for the glass." But when they jawed adrée the ker, they lastered the kosht had mullered a divio júckal that was jawán' to dant the chavo. So the ráni del the Rommany chal a sónnakai óra an' a fino gry.

But yeck koshter that poggers a hev doesn't muller a júckal.

## TRANSLATION

On a day (or once) a Gipsy was playing at cock-shy, and he threw a stick through the window of a great house and broke the glass. Came the policeman and said, "You must answer (or pay) for the glass." But when they went into the house, they found the stick had killed a mad dog that was going to bite the child (boy). So the lady gave the Gipsy a gold watch and a good horse.

But every stick that breaks a window does not kill a dog.

The Gipsies still keep in their rites and customs significant fragments of their

Oriental origin. The mystic bond of the blood covenant is often used to strengthen the tie of brotherhood. A father at the birth of his child will let a few drops of his blood fall on the swaddling clothes of the infant, or in the fire; and thieves will mark with their blood one whom they know suspects them of some offense. The practice of scattering crumbs of wedding cake over the bridal pair at the marriage ceremony, as we throw rice, is said by Professor J. G. Frazer to be for the purpose of preventing the souls of the couple from taking flight at the dangerous crisis of marriage. Their primitive intelligence is shown in some of their burial customs. The overcoat, suit, and other clothing of Isaac Hearne was folded inside out beneath his body after his death for its final disposition. This was done very possibly with the intention of making the body stay in the grave from fear of walking about unclothed, his family not

thinking that if he could walk he could also put his garments on. To doubly prevent his return his horse was slaughtered, and all his other property destroyed, or burned.

The finer qualities in the Gipsy spirit have become articulate in their music. Their fantastic moods, the things they



Vasili, son of Tšóron, and one of a band of Gipsy Coppersmiths who overran Europe early in the XXth Century. His costume, including the silver filigree buttons, is an exact reproduction of that worn by the men of his tribe

know, the things they have forgotten, something of their senses and their sorrows have spoken through it, when they could find no other voice. Their dance music is a manifestation of native temperament entrancing in its subtlety; it steals over the senses and awakens memories, and is infectious, reminiscent, and cosmopolitan. That it has been perpetuated in classical forms that will never be lost to us is proof that it has measured up to the standard of greatness. The rhythmic originality of Hungarian music, of which Liszt has spoken, is its heritage from the music of the Gipsies. And Hungarian melodies, with their peculiar style, and musical idioms, were used by Brahms as a basis for all of his Gipsy songs.

The literature, or traditional stories, of the Gipsies, which have been handed down by word of mouth through successive generations, is moulded by a wealth of fancy-aspiring ideas, and a wish to enthrall the listener. But so great is the ignorance of the people that it prevents their employing themselves in anything not providing for the immediate wants of nature, so their tales reflect only their character, thought, belief, and customs. As a rule they are illustrated by some concrete example, striking, humorous, or

odd, and they have always a strong personal interest.

The accompanying story, "The Two Swans," told by a Welsh Gipsy, Noah Lock, to Thomas W. Thomson, and recorded by him, exemplifies these characteristics. Care has been taken to repeat verbatim the original wording, as well as all phrases that appear to have been memorized, and it is reproduced here as an accurate example of Rommany dialect not generally known, or accessible to the average reader. Such tales, many of which have taken their place in collected folk lore, have their significance and value in their important æsthetic and ethical bearing as earlier and cruder forms of thought, upon the cultural standards of a later civilization.

But the strongest appeal of the Gipsies must always be an imaginative one. They will stand to us in the future, as they now do, for the things that they may never in actual fact have represented. We can seek abstraction in the thought of them from baffled hopes, and too feverish contacts. Through them we may summon fancies with which to chase fatigue and fear, and they shall quicken in us the impulse to grasp at something which we know must remain ever just beyond our reach.

## THE TWO SWANS

FROM NOAH LOCK

THE' was wonst a young lady what was very much in love, an' on recount 'n this her father an' mother they both turned agen her, an' her father said as if ever she should speak wid the young gentleman agen he should have 'em 'headed, the both 'n they. Now this young lady's parents they lived in a very big house nearby to the side 'n a lake, an' on this lake the' was two swans. It was a very nice place for a bit o' sweethearting down by this lake—all trees, an' walks, an' bits o' paths—an' it was here the young lady an' gentleman was in the habit o' meeting wid one another.

Now a'ter what the young lady's father had

said—an' he meant it, mind—they had to be very careful they wasn't seen, for they still went on meeting wid one another just the same as afore. Whatever to you, all went well for a goodish while, till one day they was catched proper, an' by the owld gentleman, the young lady's father, hisself. Now as soon as he seen they was f'un' out, the young gentleman he takes to his heels, an' runs for his life, till he comes to a t'emendous big river, what he jumps into an' swims across to the tother side—a very fine swimmer he was. An' as for the young lady, she ups an' follows him as hard as ever she can, but when she comes to the



river she doesn't know however to get across, for it was a very broad river, an' running that strong. Whatsumever, she bethinks herself 'n the two swans on the lake, an' she calls to the one 'n they to come, an' it comes, an' she gets onto its back, an' it swims wid her across. An' now as they're both'n they together agen, an' safe from getting caught, the first thing the two sweethearts does is to go an' get married.

So whatever to you, being as she was now safely married, the young lady was all for their going back home agen, but the young gentleman he didn't seem to see no sense in this; he didn't

goes on an' they goes on till they gets back to the lake agen, the two swans walking by their sides all the whole way. An' now they gets onto the two swans' backs agen, one onto each, an' the swans swims out wid 'em right into the middle'n the lake, an' then they stops. An' the two sweethearts sleeps there that night on the two swans' backs among the feathers.

Next morning they gets up right early, an' goes up to the house. Nobody's about yet, so they creeps round till they finds a window open, an' they climbs in by this, an' goes to bed in one'n the bedrooms. They might ha' been there p'r'aps



Costumes of the Gipsy women of Transylvania. The hair is greased with butter, and gold coins of various nationalities, secured from pawnshops, hang from the braids

want to be 'headed. It wa'n't no good, though, as the young lady had made up her mind to it. "Do you go then," he says, "an' I'll come a bit later on, for I'm certain sure," he says, "as if I was to go wid you now your father'd be in sich a temper he'd 'head the both 'n we." But she wouldn't hear'n this, not at no price. "What is the good 'n getting married then?" she axes. "No, we must both go," she says, "for it would be better to be 'headed together 'an 'at we should ever be parted." In the end, of course, she has her way.

So they goes back to the river an' calls for the two swans. An' they gets onto the two swans' backs, an' the swans carries 'em across to the tother side, an' as the two sweethearts goes walking along the river bank arm in arm, same as they would do for sure, the two swans goes wid 'em, one on each side. Well, whatever to you, they

five or six hours afoare one'n the sarvants comes into the room to sweep, an' finds 'em there. She goes at wonst, this sarvant does, an' tells the mistress.

Now, whatever to you, the mother'n this young lady, she doesn't want for her daughter to be 'headed, nor yet the young gentleman neither, for she sees as her child has set her heart on him. So she goes to her husband, and she tells him as she has just heard as the young people is safe, an' as she knows where they've got to. "Well where?" he axes. "Oh! that," she says, "I won't tell you, not unless you'll first gi'e me the promise not to do 'em anny harm." "I sha'n't promise no sich thing," he says; "I'll 'head the both 'n they. Now where are they? Tell me, woman, an' be quick about it." "No, I sha'n't," she says, "not till you've promised. Give 'em a good re-



commanding," she says, "but don't restroy 'em." He gets terrible angry, the owld gentleman does, but it's no use, she won't tell him; so at last he takes the oath that he'll spare their lives. Now being as he's gi'en the promise she tells him. "You'll find 'em," she says, "in sich-an'-sich a room, an' what you got to do is to make the young gentleman marry her at wonst—aye, at wonst." "By God!" he says, "I will that, but they des-erves to be 'headed, the both'n they."

He goes straight to this room now, where his da'ghter an' the young gentleman is, an' he knocks at the doar. They calls him to come in. There they are in bed, an' he could ha' f'un' it in his heart to kill 'em stone dead on the spot. "You knows what you got to expect?" he axes. "Yes," they answers, an' they didn't seem to care not a bit. An' wid them being so bravelike, an' not caring, his heart goes out for they, an' he promises as he won't do them not the leastest bit o' harm if the young gentleman'll only but do one thing. "I'll do annythink," the young gentleman answers up, "even if it should cost me my life." "Well then," he says, "I wants you to go an' get married to my da'ghter at wonst." "That's an-possible," says the young gentleman. "What!!!" he says, "you refuse to do it! Then I shall 'head the both'n you." "Well, I'm very sorry," says the young gentleman, "but I can't do it. We're married already, you see." "Married already!! How do you make that out?" he axes. "When

were you married an' where were you married, I should like to know?" "Oh! we were married yesterday," the young gentleman tells him, "over into sich-and-sich a place," mentioning its name. "That's nothink only but a pack o' lies," he says, "for you couldn't never get there, not on re-count'n the big river the' is to cross." "Oh! I swimm'd over," says the young gentleman. "Well, maybe you did," he says—he didn't be-live him, of course—"or maybe you didn't, but my da'ghter, however should she get across?" "Go an' ax the swans, daddy," she tells him. "Do you think to make a fool'n me, gal?" he says. "How should they know, poor dumb creatures like them?" "Well, go an' ax 'em," she says, "an' then you'll find out."

He's terrible angry agen, the owld gentleman is, as he thinks they're making a fool'n him. What-somever, he goes in the end, an' the swans tells him how the young gentleman swimm'd across the river, an' how they carried his sweetheart over to him, an' how they fatched the both'n they back, an' how the two sweethearts slept that night on their two backs in the middle 'n the lake.

Now a'ter when he'd heeard this, an' when he knowed by it as the young people hadn't been telling him no lies, he began to think as he'd been very hard on they. So he gi'ed his da'ghter an' his new son-i'-law a big house close by to his own, an' there they lived happy ever a'ter. An' for annythink as I know they're living there still.

## THE NOVEL IN THE MODERN WORLD

BY RALPH BLOCK

STRANGE things are happening in the art of fiction, but the shadow of traditional ideas about it keeps the public from seeing and understanding what the metamorphosis means. The novel as a form is still so young that, in the stretch of its lifetime, the novel of the Nineteenth Century, which everybody knows about and is familiar with, seems a great distance to the rear. That allows it to assume a disproportionate and overwhelming position as an established thing. Dickens and Thackeray bulk in the eyes of so much of the world as great novelists of time, when they were only great novel-

ists of their time. Now there is a musty air coming from their works, but the world through long habit and lack of analysis always associates decay with greatness, because so many of the obviously and accepted great institutions of the world are decayed.

The evil effects of this are not far to seek. Most of the criticism of the novel that gets into print where plain people can read it has its measurements from the old styles of novel, and everything that cannot be submitted to this kind of estimate, is outcast as novelty instead of novel. After all, reputation in the world every-